

PERFIN PRICES

By DAVE HILL

I would like to get some input from members on perfin values. It is a thing I am often asked by prospective members. I have only a small collection, having only been a member for ten years, so have little idea of the true value of perfins.

I see the prices of 1d reds and full names in our Auction catalogues, but still have no idea about ordinary stamps.

One thing I can tell correspondents who think they are sitting on a fortune with inverted or reversed perfins - these have no significance whatsoever.

Rarity may (or may not) have something to do with the following:-

We have say 22,500 different dies on GB stamps although some dies are very similar. From 1870 to 1970, the hundred years when perfins were most used, GB issued say 700 stamps (SG 100 to 800). This is over 17 million possible combinations of stamp and perfin. Even if the actual is only 10% of possible, this is still nearly 2 million combinations.

More figures: In 1907 the Post Office estimated that Slopers perforated £548,600 of stamps annually. (Their largest competitor Allchin, perforated £87,000). Many of these would have been ½d and some £1 stamps. Would it be fair to take an old 1d as average? At 240 to the £1 that's over 100 million perfins in just one year!

On the other hand, before you throw that partial on the fire, how many office boys broke their brand new perfin machine on the first sheet of stamps? He'd never be asked to do the job again. Also when perfins were looked upon as damaged stamps how many were destroyed, or still are being destroyed? How many perfin dies are only known by one or two copies? Odd ones are still coming to light.

Before I leave the supply side of perfins, there are those perfins in the collection of once keen, now dormant, collectors. Also what about the collectors who just hoard and don't sort their perfins? What about the perfins which are "lost" to us in the collections of postal historians?

So much for the supply side, which must have a bearing on price, but what about demand?

First and foremost on the demand side is the popularity of our branch of the hobby, which is increasing. Generally stamp collecting is on the up but, unlike in the 70's, collectors are avoiding new issues and modern first day covers. Collectors are being more discerning and are specialising. Perfins are not just another country to collect, they are not in Gibbons, there is no Lighthouse printed album for them and perhaps this is part of their appeal.

Even then you can collect perfins at whatever level you like, there are no rules. Whereas a specialised GB collector almost always uses a Windsor Album; or a 1d plater always refers to Wiggins; the perfin collector has no "bible" to follow.

The only problem is that some collectors are put off because perfin collecting is so different. With continual new discoveries and development of the catalogues, it seems we, are "moving the goalposts all the time".

The only other demand, already referred to, is that from the non-perfin collector. Far from being a defective stamp it appears that perfins are now acceptable to postal history and thematic collectors.

One experience of dealers I have is that many perfin covers come from one dealer and a couple of our members are good customers of his and take the best. Many of the rest, the dealer hawks to other dealers at fairs and exhibitions, saying that "you had better have some perfin covers, you are bound to be asked for some. I have priced these, you can have them at half the marked price." What chance do the rest of us have?

Finally, to digress, another frequent request I get is for a neat cover with a clear copy of so and so's (uncommon) perfin on. I know of no-one who has a ready supply of such things. Those who do have one, no doubt want to keep it for their own collection.

So, let me know what you think. Is there any other way you can suggest of building a perfin collection apart from our auctions, packet or the few dealers who occasionally stock them?

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